

CHAPTER III

FOUR AND TWENTY TIRTHAMKARAS

वामनोऽपि ततश्चके तत्र तीर्थावगाहनम् ।
याद्यूपः शिवो दृष्टः सूर्यबिम्बे दिग्म्बरः ॥
पद्मासनस्थितः सौभ्यस्तथा तं तत्र संस्मरन् ।
प्रतिष्ठाप्य महामूर्ति पूजयामास वासरम् ॥
मनोऽभीष्टार्थं सिद्धर्थं ततः सिद्धिमवासवान् ।
नेभिनाथ शिवेत्येवं नामचक्रे स वामनः ॥

[Vamana regarded the place as a Tirtha. The (true) form of Siva, even that digambara (undraped) form was seen in the Image in the Sun ! Recalling the form of the Lord, seated in the padmāsana (the sitting yoga posture with legs crossed) which is the embodiment of tranquillity itself, he established the Image of Bāsara, and worshipped it ! This he did to attain to the fulfilment of the wish of his heart: this wish was fulfilled ! That Vamana named Nemi Nath Siva !] —The Skande Purana (Hindu): Prabhāsa Part, xvi. 94—96.

There is a special fascination in the number four and twenty; the Hindus have twenty-four *avatāras* (incarnations) of their favourite god, Viṣṇu; there were twenty-four counsellor gods of

the ancient Babylonians; the Buddhists posit four-and twenty previous Buddhas, that is, teaching gods. The Zoroastrians also have twenty-four Ahuras who are regarded as "the mightiest to advance desire and Dominion of blessings!" These Great Ones are thus addressed in one of the sacred books of the Parsis :—

" Your blessings shall ye give us, all ye that are one in will, with whom right good thought, Piety and Mazda (are one), according to promise giving your aid when worshipped with reverence " (Yasna, li. 20).

But the more remarkable case of identity of thought between Jainism and a non-Jaina creed is furnished by Jewish Apocrypha which acknowledges exactly four and twenty " faces " on the Ladder of Jacob. The explanation given is as follows :—

" The ladder which thou sawest which had twelve steps having two human faces which changed their appearance—now this ladder is this age, and the twelve steps are the times of this age, and the twenty-four faces are the kings of the lawless heathen of this age. Under these kings will be tried (thy children's children and the line of) thy sons" (The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament, pages 96, 98 and 99.)

Of course, the language would not have been apocryphal had it been a little more lucid! But the true interpretation of the passage is not

difficult. The term heathen refers to the non-Israelites; and the lawless are those who have risen above the dead letter of the law, that is to say, who conform to the spirit of the teaching and who have rid themselves of the petrifying outer encrustation, namely, the mere rules and regulations of the scriptures. Hence, those who have realized the Self, *i.e.*, the divinity of their Soul, are the lawless, and their four and twenty kings are the four and twenty TIRTHAMKARAS under whom shall be judged, that is to say, by whose standard, shall be judged all those who seek to attain salvation. In other words, the four and twenty Tirthamkaras are models of Perfection for men, who must raise themselves to Their standard to be 'saved.'

Such is the testimony furnished by the Jewish Esotericism, which is the only true side of their religion. 'Its true merit has been lost sight of owing to the allegorical vogue, which has estranged us from one another and from the Truth. When the true interpretation of the world's apocrypha is reached, the differences will simply melt away, leaving men gaping at each other, in sheer astonishment and wonder! Let the reader read 'The Key of Knowledge,' the 'Confluence of Opposites' and the 'Glimpses of A Hidden Science in Original Christian

Teachings,' to realize this great truth for himself.

But the most remarkable case of this doctrinal identity is furnished by the Christian Apocalypse, where the scene and the surroundings are purely Jainist. An initiation scene is laid in allegorical style. In the centre of a huge hall is placed a throne on which is placed Life (*Jiva*) that is Divine; round about the Throne are four and twenty seats on which sit four and twenty Elders, robed in white and wearing crowns of gold. In this Assembly is introduced the Lamb (the symbol of the soul characterized with supreme humility) that is to be initiated. In front of the Throne are four remarkable beasts: one of them is like a lion, another resembles an eagle, the third has the appearance of a calf, and the fourth has the face of a man. These beasts have six wings each, and are full of eyes all over; and they rest not night and day, but keep on blessing the One on the Throne.

Such is the scenic imagery of the hall of initiation. A detailed elucidation of it is to be found in the tenth chapter of 'The Key of Knowledge' and the seventh and the ninth lectures of the 'Confluence of Opposites'; but a brief explanation may be attempted here. The beasts represent the different kinds of souls that are em-

bodied in the four elements (of matter), namely, the earth-bodied (represented by the lion, since he walks on the earth), the air-bodied (represented by the eagle who flies in the air), the water-bodied (represented by the calf, which is the young of the sea-mammals), and the fire-bodied (represented by the sun which is painted as the face of a man). Wings are a symbol for time, since it flies; and the number six is descriptive of the six *aras* of a half-cycle in which four and twenty Tirthamkaras appear and preach the Truth. Plainly put, the significance of the secret teaching is only this that Life is Divine, and its divinity is manifested most perfectly and fully in the case of four and twenty Tirthamkaras, who appear in a half-cycle of time, consisting of six *aras*, and preach the Noble Truth to and for the benefit of the souls embodied in material bodies! Why these higher truths were couched in the mystery language that is generally unintelligible to men, will be found explained in the books named above, and cannot be repeated here.

The *Tirthamkaras*, then, are only four and twenty in each half-cycle of time. But the number of *Siddhas* is very great. The Siddhas are exactly like the Tirthamkaras in all respects in so far as innate virtues and attainments are concerned. They are all omniscient, and endowed

with exactly the same attributes as the Tirthamkaras. But They differ from the latter in this that teaching is not Their mission in life in the same way as it is that of the Tirthamkaras, and therefore They are not surrounded by the Pomp with which *devas* and men surround the latter.

The *Siddhas* are also referred to both in the Jewish and the Christian Apocrypha. In the former it is said :—

“ And I Esdras saw upon the mount Sion a great multitude whom I could not number, and they all praised the lord with songs. And in the midst of them there was a young man of high stature, taller than all the rest and upon every one of their heads he set crowns, and was more exalted; whereat I marvelled greatly. So I asked the angel, and said, What are these, my lord? He answered and said unto me, These be they that have put off mortal clothing, and put on the immortal, and have confessed the name of God: now are they crowned, and receive palms. Then said I unto the angel, What young man is he that setteth crowns upon them, and giveth them palms in their hands? So he answered and said unto me, It is the son of God, whom they have confessed in the world.”
—II Esdras, Chap. II.

Briefly the explanation of the above half-plain half-mystic account is this: by following the Ideal (in Jewish and Christian terminology, the Son of God) souls are crowned into Divinity, and the number of Those that have freed and

shall thus free themselves from subjection to the inimical forces is countless. These are the *Siddhas* of Jainism!

The Christian description of the *Siddhas* is given in the seventh chapter of the Book of Revelation in the 9th and 13th to 17th verses, and runs as follows :—

9. “ After this I beheld, and lo a great multitude which no man could number stood before the throne, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

13. “ And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, what are these that are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14. “ And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15. “ Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16. “ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

17. “ For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

This is undoubtedly the true description of the status of *Siddhahood*, in mystic script. For

a detailed elucidation of the passage reference must, again, be made to the books already mentioned; for this is no place for the elaboration of allegorical exegesis. But it will interest us to know what Clement of Alexandria, who, according to Methodius, was an immediate disciple of St. Peter himself, says as to the four and twenty Elders of the Christian Apocalypse. He writes (see the Ante Nicene Christian Library, Vol. XII. pp. 365-366) :—

“ He then who has first moderated his passion and trained himself for impassibility, and developed to the beneficence of gnostic perfection, is here equal to the angels. Luminous already, and like the sun shining in the exercise of beneficence, he speeds by righteous knowledge through the love of God to the sacred abode, like as the apostles And although here upon earth he be not honoured with the chief seat, he will sit down on the four and twenty thrones, judging the people, as John says in the Apocalypse.”

These thrones, then, are intended for the greatest Teachers among men, by whose standard, or norm, men shall have to judge themselves if they want to attain to divine Perfection. These are the Tirthamkaras whose number is identically the same as that of the thrones and of the Elders who are seated on them !

Concerning the excellence of the condition of the *Siddhas* (in Christian terminology, the Saved

Ones) the Early Christian teaching mentioned the same characteristics of Their Existence in Nirvana as are given in the Jaina Scriptures :—

“ There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”—Revelation xxi. 4.

“ . . . in which there is neither sleep, nor pain, nor corruption, nor care, nor night, nor day measured by time . . . eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him.”—A.N.C. Lib., Vol. ix. part ii, p. 50.

“ For the incorruptible nature is not subject to generation; it grows not, sleeps not, hungers not, is not wearied, suffereth not, dies not, is not pierced by nails and spears, sweats not, drops not with blood. Of such kind are the natures of angels and of souls released from the body. For . . . these are of another kind, and different from these creatures of our world, which are visible and perishing.”—Ibid., p. 88.

About the permanence of the condition of Liberation it is said :—

“ . . . and they shall reign for ever and ever.”—Revelation xxii. 5.

The correspondence is marvellous in each detail! We may, then, take it that the number of the Perfect Ones, the *Siddhas*, is very large, while the Tirthamkaras are only four and twenty.

But what are we to say to those wiseacres who think that Jainism only came into existence in the time of Mahavira or at the earliest in that of Parśva Nath, and the earlier two and twenty Tirthamkaras are the outcome of the Jaina imagination? Some of these intellectual giants had at one time relegated the Jaina Creed to the position of an offshoot of Buddhism, that was deemed to have arisen in the sixth century of the Christian era! But to-day the historicity of Parśva Nath is beyond dispute. What is really remarkable about the Jaina account is the confirmation of the number four and twenty itself from non-Jaina sources. The Hindus, indeed, never disputed the fact that Jainism was founded by Riśabha Deva in this half-cycle, and placed His time almost at what they conceived to be the commencement of the world ! They recognised His Divinity fully, acknowledged that He was Omniscient, and counted Him amongst their *avatāras*. They give the same parentage of Riśabha Deva as the Jainas do ; they even agree that His son was the Emperor Bharata who lent his name to India, that is to say, after whom India came to be known as Bhāratvarṣa. If this is not history and historical confirmation I do not know what else would be covered by these terms. There is even an old inscription in the

Khandagiri Hill in which there is a mention of a consecrated Statue of the first Tirthamkara, Rishabha Deva, that had been carried off by King Nanda Vardhana about 2400 years ago, and that was brought back to Kalinga (Orissa), by Kharvale, in the 2nd century B.C., from Pataliputra (modern Patna). This Statue most probably dated back prior to Mahavira's time, and possibly even to that of Parśva Nath.

As for the other *Tirthamkaras*, Arista Nemi is a name which is quite familiar in the Hindu literature including the Vedas, and he would appear to be identical with the twenty-second Tirthamkara who bore that name, but was generally known as Nemi Nath. Modern opinion is now veering round to regard Nemi Nath as a real historical person (see "Lord Arishtanemi" by H. Bhattacharya, pp. 88-89). In the Rig and the Yajur Vedas, too, there is a mention of the Lord (see the Jaina Patha Pradarshak, iii. 94—107); but no historical details are given to fix the identity, which is, however, established by other references. The Hindu scripture, the Prabhāsa (Skande) Purāṇa distinctly acknowledges Nemi Nath, as is evident from the quotation at the top of this chapter. A reference to the seventh Tirthamkara, Sri Suparśva Nath, is to be found in the Buddhist literature

which shows the existence of a temple of "Sappu" in Rajagrihi in Buddha's time (Lord Arishtanemi, p. 86). In the Rig Veda itself mention has been made of the first Tirthamkara, Riśabha Deva, by name (Rig Veda, X.12. 168), though the Hindus now interpret the text in a way to obliterate the reference. Hindu scholars are, however, not wanting who have sincerely felt the identity to be undeniable (Historical Gleanings, p. 76; the Jaina Pathapradarśak, Vol. III, Part 3, p. 106). It is interesting to note that Jaina writers have quoted many other passages from the Vedas themselves which are no longer to be found in the current editions. Weeding has very likely been carried out on a large scale. This may be accounted for by the bitter hostility of the Hindus towards Jainism in recent historical times.

Further references to Jainism are to be found in the Hindu books under various names. The term "*arhan*" repeatedly occurs in the oldest of the Vedas. There is also the text मुनयः चात्मकाः which is descriptive of Jaina Saints (Rig Veda X. 136-2 and Indian Antiquary, Vol. XXX. p. 280), as Dr. Webber admits. Jaina saints were also termed *śramanas*; and there is a mention, in the Rig Veda, of *śramanas* who interfered in the Hindu sacrifices ("Bhagwan Parśva Nath,"

p. 21). The sect of Vratyas mentioned in the Atharva Veda can, again, be the Jainas and none else. The term means the observer of vows, as distinguished from the performer of sacrifices which applied to the Hindus at the time, and has been commented upon by a learned scholar, Prof. A. Chakravarti, in the Jaina Gazette (Vol. XXI Part 6), and by Babu Kamta Prasad Jain in “*Bhagwan Parśva Nath*” (see the Introduction). The Vratyas* were of two kinds, the saints and the householders. In the fifteenth part of the Atharva Veda there is a mention of a Maha (great) Vratya who must be one of the *Tirthamkaras*, and presumably Riṣabha Deva, the first. He is said to have stood in one (*yoga*) posture for a whole year, after which at the request of certain *devas*, he occupied a seat furnished by them. The *devas* are also said to

* Mr. K. P. Jayaswal gives the following account of the Vratyas in the Modern Review for 1929 (see p. 499): “The Lichchhavis ruled opposite Pataliputra in the district of Muzaffarpur. They are called Vratyas or un-Brahmanical Kshatriyas; they had a republican form of government; they had their own shrines, their non-Vedic worship, their own religious leaders; they patronized Jainism . . . Mahavira was born among them. Manu condemns them as degenerates. Chandragupta’s son, Samudragupta, who acquired the Imperial position for himself and his family by establishing an all-India Empire, proudly describes himself as the *douhitra* (daughter’s son) of the Lichchhavis.”

have attended upon him in his ‘ rambles.’ As we shall see later on all this tallies with the life of the first *Tirthamkara* in a very remarkable manner. Not the least significant is the reference in the *Yoga Vaśiṣṭha* (xv. 8) to Jainism, where Rama himself says :

नाहं रामो न मे वाञ्छा भावेषु न च मे मनः ।
शान्त आसितुमिच्छामि स्वात्मनीव जिनो यथा ॥८॥

[Tr. Rama said : I am not Rama (object of meditation for yogis), nor (am I free from) desires ; I wish to attain, in mine own self, the tranquillity of the *Jina* (Conqueror, *i. e.*, *Tirthamkara*) !]

This shows that Jainism was flourishing at the time of Rama which is very very ancient according to Hindu reckoning.

The confirmation from outside Jainism of its sacred tradition is not to be wondered at. It is precisely what is to be expected if its teaching is really concerned with Truth, and the emancipation of souls. The explanation of the differences of the other religions with Jainism as well as with one another among themselves, is to be found in their resort to allegorical style, as has been explained in my works on comparative religion. The truth is that different on their outward surface, they are nevertheless at one with one

another at the core, and present the same doctrine and teaching with Jainism.

These World-Teachers, the Jinas, or Tirthamkaras, it is to be noticed, are not worship-seeking, psalm-loving, prayer-granting, wish-fulfilling deities. Their religion forbids all these things. They will tell you to go away elsewhere if you want boons from Them ! They only have Their teaching to give, which at once demands the renunciation of all the 'good' things of the world, and will not, in any sense, encourage one's crying for them. Those who come to worship Them have to take leave of the world one day ! There is no reason, then, why the Jainas should falsely insist on positing all the four and twenty Jinas ! One World-Teacher would be quite enough for the Teaching. His example and footprints will be enough for men's needs ! If the question was of granting boons or the prayers of the devotees, the larger the number of gods, the better it would be for mankind. But that is not the case here. As for the lustre of antiquity, the thirst for which is said to have moved the Jainas to invent the first twenty-two of the Tirthamkaras, the historicity of the first Holy Lord being established from the unassailable testimony of the Scriptures of Hinduism which comes from a rival faith, there could

have been no occasion for Jainas to be worried over the matter. Important evidence, recently unearthed by the Archaeological Department of India, abundantly shows the prevalence of Jainism long long before the age which the modern investigators have assigned to the oldest of the Vedas. A number of Statuettes have been recovered at Mohenjo-daro which are characterised by half-shut eyes, the gaze being fixed on the tip of the nose. "These statuettes clearly indicate that the people of the Indus Valley in the Chalcolithic period not only practised yoga but worshipped the images of the yogis." The Memoir of the Archaeological Survey of India).^{*} This takes us several thousands of years beyond the date of the Statue of the first Tirthamkara, which was carried off by Nanda Vardhana in the fifth century B.C. These human Statuettes must be Jaina relics, as they are outside the Vedic Pantheon and Cult. But all this merely confirms what an astute and recondite scholar, Major J.G.R. Forlong, said years ago (see "Short Studies in the Science of Comparative Religion," pages 243-244) :—

"All Upper, Western, North Central India was

* See the "Survival of the Pre-historic Civilization of the Indus Valley," and the Pioneer, dated November 10th, 1929.

then—say 1500 to 800 B.C. and, indeed, from unknown times—ruled by Turanians, conveniently called Dravids, and given to tree, serpent and phalik worship but there also then existed throughout upper India an ancient and highly organized religion, philosophikal, ethikal and severely ascetikal, *viz.*, Jainism out of which clearly developed the early ascetikal features of Brahmanism and Buddhism. Long before Aryans reached the Ganges or even the Sarasvati, Jainas had been taught by some twenty-two prominent Bodhas, saints or Tirthamkaras, prior to the historical twenty-third Bodha Parsva of the eighth or ninth century B.C., and he knew of all his predecessors—pious Rishis living at long intervals of time; and of several scriptures even then known as Purvas or Puranas, that is, ‘ancient,’ which had been handed down for ages in the memory of recognized anchorites, Vanaprasthas or ‘forest recluses.’ This was more especially a Jaina Order, severely enforced by all their ‘Bodhas’ and particularly in the sixth century B.C. by the twenty-fourth and last, Mahavira of 598-526 B.C. This ascetik Order continued in Brahmanism and Buddhism throughout distant Baktria and Dacia. . . .”

It would thus seem that the moderns have to revise their methods of reasoning and research if they wish their inferences to accord with solid facts.